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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001754

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT
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NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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SUBJECT: Cohabitation row continues as President blasts PM over security

Refs: Colombo 1642, and previous

(U) Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Kumaratunga has responded to a nasty letter sent by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on September 18. In the response, the President criticizes the PM's record on national security and urges him to put the country before his desire to remain in power. The continued critical back-and-forth between the two underscores the tense cohabitation relationship and may have implications for the peace process. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) As previously reported (Reftel), President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe have exchanged several nasty letters regarding the security situation around the eastern port city of Trincomalee. The latest salvo in this back-and-forth came on October 6, when the President responded to the PM's letter of September 18. The letter, which is quite lengthy and detailed, was reproduced in the press on October 8. The President made the following key points in the letter:

-- The President characterizes the PM's responses to her security concerns as "evasive, and attempt to divert attention from the very serious threat to national security, caused by your acts of omissions and commissions of the peace process."

-- Re her track record as Minister of Defense, the President refutes the PM's criticism of her tenure, and lashes out at the PM, stating that "Your own highly personalized version of recent historical events wholly belie actual facts."

-- Responding to the PM's allegations that she made military decisions on the basis of party politics, the President queries the PM as to his meaning, stating "Am I to understand that your political ethics and morality regarding the national interest means that one must hide from the Cabinet of Ministers, the relevant authorities, and the people, the true facts about crucial matters of state such as the sovereignty and security of the state and the safety of our peoples? If ensuring the latter is what you call playing politics, it will be most interesting to know what you consider to be statesmanship and effective governance."

3. (U) The President goes on to state that, despite his assurances, the PM had not taken steps to improve preparedness or taken any initiatives to strengthen the military. Further, she criticizes the PM's national security strategy, alleging that on the PM's watch, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had murdered Tamil democratic political activists, continued recruitment, smuggled in arms, and "completely dominated the lives of the community in the entire government controlled northern and eastern provinces."

4. (U) In closing the letter, the President urges the PM to "attempt seriously, if it is at all possible, to put the country before self and the desire to remain in power at any cost." Wrapping up, the President offers to advise and give leadership to the PM, "if you are willing, even at this late stage, to realize what is best by the country and not only for yourself."

Cohabitation problems continue

5. (C) Mission checked with contacts in the PM's office, who reported that the PM had not yet decided whether or not to respond to the President's letter. Dr. Pakiasothy Saraivanamuttu, the executive director of the Center for Policy Alternatives, a local think-tank, told poloff on October 8 that the President's criticism of the PM was merely her attempt to create a situation of "discomfort" with how the PM was handling the

security situation and the peace process.
Saraivanamuttu added that he was unconvinced that the President would take any dramatic action towards the PM, and that if the relationship between the two did not improve, there could be an adverse effect on the peace process.

16. (C) COMMENT: Judging from the tone of their correspondence, neither cohabitation partner has learned to deal civilly with the other. The implications for the sort of political compromise and collegiality that may well be required as the peace process moves forward are not encouraging. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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